



**KEN LEWENZA**  
*National President*  
*Président national*

**SYLVAIN MARTIN**  
*Quebec Director*  
*Directeur québécois*

**PETER KENNEDY**  
*National Secretary-Treasurer*  
*Secrétaire-trésorier national*

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205 PLACER COURT, TORONTO, ONTARIO M2H 3H9  
PHONE (416) 497-4110 FAX: (416) 495-6559

**March 14, 2013**

**To: CAW Locals**

## **March 21st – International Day for the Elimination of Racism**

United Against Racism: Dignity and Justice for All

On March 21, 1960 in Sharpeville, South Africa, hundreds of activists stood against the apartheid regime and said no to “pass laws,” which separated families, limited free movement and deemed racialized individuals as lesser human beings. The Apartheid regime (which was based on the model of the Canadian Reserve System for Aboriginal Peoples) killed 69 and wounded 180 demonstrators that day.

The Security Council of the United Nations, in an unprecedented move, condemned the Sharpeville massacre and South African government for their racist and inhumane actions. Each year, March 21 serves as a reminder of the harsh consequences for millions of victims subject to racism and racial discrimination around the world.

There has certainly been progress in the last number of years but that progress has been limited and there have been serious setbacks as well.

Today systemic racism is taking increasingly diversified forms: racial profiling, non-recognition of acquired skills, discriminatory hiring practices, exploitation of migrant workers, just to name a few. People of colour in Canada are three times more likely to be poor than other Canadians because of imbalances in access to education, barriers to employment and low wages. Aboriginal people experience persistent health and income inequities - conditions made worse by racism and discrimination. As union members, we have the responsibility to speak out, take a stand, and fight for equality and combat racism in all its forms.

A Conservative private member’s bill (Bill C-304), currently under review in the Senate, aims to repeal Section 13 of the Canadian Human Rights Act. Section 13 bans hate speech transmitted over the Internet or by telephone. If passed, this new law would remove hate speech from the Canadian Human Rights Act which means human rights commissions will not have the authority to investigate online hate speech and request that violating websites be taken down.

This proposed piece of legislation is extremely disturbing and, in our view, severely weakens the human rights in Canada. This is a move to deregulate hate in our country. And it reverses progress that we have made over the years.

Dismissing Section 13 out-of-hand is not warranted. Instead, the federal government needs to take a comprehensive approach to identify and remedy Internet hate crimes – an approach that's developed through dialogue and consultation with stakeholders including workers, civil society organizations and Internet service providers.

Each of us has an important role to play in building a society free of racism. We must challenge both old and new forms of systemic racial discrimination. A lot of work remains as racism still exists in our workplaces, our unions, Canadian society and across the world.

To download the official March 21 pamphlet visit: [www.caw.ca/march21](http://www.caw.ca/march21). I am encouraging all CAW workplace representatives to familiarize themselves with the leaflet and to distribute copies to other members. As trade unionists, we have a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the destructiveness of racism in our workplaces. And we should do so whenever and wherever possible.

We must remain vigilant in our condemnation of racial discrimination and hate. Bill C-304 is a controversial piece of legislation that deserves far more attention than it has been given. It aims to disarm human rights commissions from investigating online hate speech, under the guise of "freedom of speech." It flies in the face of what March 21 stands for.

Over the coming weeks, CAW Human Rights Director Vinay Sharma will be in touch with local union Aboriginal/Workers of Colour and Human Rights committees to discuss campaign ideas, and awareness-raising initiatives among our members. Our goal is to keep the spirit of March 21 alive throughout the year, to help us mobilize against injustices like Bill C-304 and politicians that champion them. Please feel free to write Vinay in the meantime with any questions: [humanrights@caw.ca](mailto:humanrights@caw.ca)

Also, if your local union is planning an event or activity to commemorate March 21, please be sure to inform Vinay in the CAW Human Rights Department and send any pictures or materials to: [humanrights@caw.ca](mailto:humanrights@caw.ca)

In solidarity,



**Ken Lewenza**  
**National President**  
**CAW - Canada**

cc: Front office, Assistants, NEB, National Reps, National Co-ordinators  
KL/VS/March 21-2013/so:cope343